No. 83

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"But that is not all!" he cried in stentorian tones. "I took the trouble to look into this thing. I paid a visit to his home and had a talk with his sick wife."

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ALICE stared at Robert Ames as if she had seen seen a ghost. She hardly recognized his pale, haggard face, as he stood on the threshold of her boudoir. His eyes had lost their brilliance and his shoulders drooped.

He came forward with a feeble smile on his lips.

"Robert!" she cried, advancing quickly to greet him. "What has happened? You look frightful."

He took her outstretched hand and held it for some moments. He looked rather embarrassed. The words he was about to utter struck in his throat.

The words Alice had spoken were only too true. Robert Ames looked frightful.

His face had aged ten years in the last three days.

His proud carriage and noble bearing was sadly missing.

He looked like a man who had just recovered from a malignant disease.

"You are not well, Robert," she said with her voice singularly soft and sympathetic. "I will telephone for Dr. Fielding."

Robert raised his hand in protest.

"I am quite well, Alice," he replied wearily. "In fact I believe that I am now on the road to complete recovery."

His words belied his apparent physical condition. His eyes were lifeless and it seemed that he stood erect only with an effort.

"I hope I did not hurt your feelings by failing to meet you at the door when you arrived, Robert," she pleaded. "I would gladly have come, but I was afraid that my face was not a welcome nor pleasing sight to you."

Robert Ames gazed at Alice.

She looked magnificent and his eyes fell before her

coaxing glances. She was all humility and sweetness.

"Can you forgive me, Alice?" the young husband asked in a low, toneless voice. "I have done you a very grievous wrong, and will do anything to atone for it. The woman for whose sake I would have cast aside everything else in this world, has left me.

"She inflicted a wound which will be hard to heal. Please refrain from speaking of her in the future, Alice. The past is dead."

With a glad cry Alice threw herself on Robert's breast. At last her hour of triumph had come and now her dear beloved husband was all her own.

"I forgive you with all my heart, dear husband," she replied in a scarcely audible voice. "I am this moment the happiest woman in all the wide world, and you could make me still happier by allowing me just to be near you, to care for you, and soothe those gripping heartaches which must be yours."

She hid her scarlet face in his bosom.

Slowly she raised her eyes to his and responding to the mute invitation of her full red lips, he kissed her for the first time since their marriage.

Alice's heart and soul, all her pent up emotions and passions, rose to the surface.

She clung to him madly until he at last gently disengaged himself from her embrace.

Robert suffered the kiss without the least show of affection. This was his peace offering to her.

A moment later he turned wearily and left the room, expressing the hope of seeing Alice at dinner.

They met again that evening and sat opposite each other at the table. Robert's mother looked on with a curious smile as Alice assumed the duties of a considerate housewife.

It seemed that she was tireless in her efforts to

please Robert.

She hovered about him, put sugar in his coffee, and was willing and eager to do all in her power to please him.

After dinner Robert Ames was made comfortable by Alice in the cozy living room. She brought him the evening papers and took a seat at his feet.

This was their first evening at home and the young wife was in the seventh heaven of delight.

This was the life she had dreamed of at the side of the man whom she loved so madly, and he had at last given her some reason to believe that he was all her own.

Robert allowed Alice to wait upon him with a tolerant smile.

It seemed to give her immense pleasure and he had no desire to make her unhappy by being rude or unappreciative.

He glanced over the sporting pages and read the critics of the latest shows; but he could not find anything which really interested him.

As he turned the page he came upon a news item which drew his attention.

It was the headline that attracted him first. He read the entire column in breathless haste, while his face grew pale.

His hand trembled violently, and it was the rustling of the paper which drew the attention of Alice.

She looked up and watched him narrowly through the corners of her eyes as his hold on the paper again tightened.

Her suspicion was instantly aroused because there was but one object that could make Robert so lose his self-control.

She made up her mind to read that article as soon

as possible. She tried to count the pages so as to be sure that she had the right place.

The article read as follows:

BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN FOUND WANDERING IN THE STREETS OF NEW YORK—A MYSTERIOUS CASE.

A remarkably beautiful young woman was found this morning wandering aimlessly about the streets of this city.

The woman was well dressed and bears every mark of culture and refinement.

The sad feature of this case is that the young woman seems to have lost her memory entirely.

Every effort to learn her name and the location of her home has proven futile.

From the incoherent words she utters from time to time, it has been gathered that she came from some small country town in Pennsylvania, and that she had been enticed to come here by a man whom she called her cousin.

There is no mark of identification on her clothing, and the authorities are completely baffled.

Robert Ames felt the eyes of Alice upon him, and he tried to hide his agitation. She must not know of his discovery in the evening paper.

He felt positive that this unfortunate young woman was none other than his Hazel.

He had arrived at a conclusion the instant he finished reading the article.

Without consulting anyone he meant to take the first train for New York the next morning.

With the help of the police he hoped to be able to locate the woman whom he believed to be Hazel.

He little dreamed, however, that another man had read the article some hours since and was this very moment speeding toward New York.

Robert felt a strange elation in his still aching heart. He rose suddenly and taking the paper with him, sought the seclusion of the library.

This was his sanctum where no one entered without being announced, and he could reason this thing out by himself without the scrutinizing eyes of Alice being constantly upon him.

Alice looked after her husband with a puzzled expression.

She would have given much to know what had caused his sudden agitation, and why he left the room so abruptly without saying a word.

She waited for his return until her eyes grew very heavy with sleep. Then she rose with a disappointed sigh and went to her own apartment.

In the meantime Robert Ames was searching every nook and corner in his desk to locate a railroad timetable.

At last he found it.

He scanned it thoroughly and found that a train left over the Baltimore and Ohio, at seven o'clock the next morning.

But Robert Ames was not used to arising at an early hour. If he wanted to take that train he must get up no later than six o'clock. This gave him something to think about for a few minutes.

Finally he decided that he could trust Jackson his valet, to awaken him. He was a man who had grown old in the service of the Ames family. And he forthwith instructed the man.

When the young master of the house went to bed at last, he could not sleep. His mind, overactive, conjured up various pictures of his Hazel. And none of them were pleasant.

Chapter 274

EARL CORTLAND

IT IS AN old saying that a leopard will never change its spots. And it is equally true that the character of most human beings will never change. Alice had always been a vain, selfish woman. Up to the time she met handsome young Robert Ames, love had never touched her.

Her marriage to Philip Gordon was not founded on love and affection. It was a marriage of convenience. And how it terminated need not be retold here.

But when Alice met Robert Ames, she met her fate. He awoke within her a love that was as desperate as it was deep.

And yet there was an element of selfishness in that love of hers. As usual Alice was looking out for herself and her future.

As the wife of a multi-millionaire banker a life of luxury and ease was assured. Not even her most dangerous enemies could touch her, for unlimited wealth meant power and protection.

However, a marriage brought about through a chain of circumstances such as surrounded Alice and Robert Ames, was destined to hit the rocks sooner or later. But Alice did not give this a thought.

She was living in the present. All of her thoughts and energies were directed to keep her young husband from again coming in personal touch with Hazel Wynne.

She had a well defined intuition that Robert surely meant to go to New York in search of the lovely young

creature.

And she also believed that the girl, found wandering in the streets of New York, was none other than her hated rival.

All night long she lay awake, trying to find some method by which she might be able to prevent Robert from taking that trip.

Before she retired she had heard him give orders to Jackson, his valet, that he wanted to be awakened no later than six o'clock.

This indicated without question that Robert was determined to take the seven o'clock train for New York.

Alice's accomplice was Arthur Vernon. And this rascal was already on the way to New York. She knew that Robert could not be swerved from his purpose.

And so she had to depend entirely upon Vernon's ability to get a hold of Hazel before Robert arrived at New York.

This idea seemed to have worked out very well, for young Ames' trip to the great metropolis did not produce the expected result.

At police headquarters he was informed that the unknown young woman had been taken in charge. She had been sent to the woman's detention home for observation.

But here "her husband" had come to claim her. Disappointed and sick at heart, Robert returned to the railroad station to take the next train back to Philadelphia.

He was convinced that this unfortunate young woman could not have been his Hazel. And yet, it was quite possible that the man who claimed to be her husband was a lover of hers.

On the train he sat in moody reflection. Suddenly

he became conscious that a man seated on the other side of the aisle was regarding him with open curiosity.

The man was well dressed and apparently belonged to Ames' own class. But he displayed rudeness in his persistent stare.

Robert gave him a hard look, but the other just smiled amiably.

"The damned impudence of the fellow," was Ames' mental observation. "I would like to give him a good punch between the eyes."

Under ordinary conditions Robert would not have expressed himself in this manner. He was always courteous to strangers and never lost his temper.

But there was something about this man that impressed him as singularly repellent.

Burying his face in the newspaper, he tried to forget the man. A moment later, however, he was startled to hear a voice close to his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, sir," it said politely enough. "Could you oblige me with a match?"

Robert Ames looked up quickly.

It was the man from across the aisle. The match was produced, and again Robert turned to his paper. The stranger lingered.

"Cortland is my name," he announced in the most matter-of-fact manner, "Earl Cortland. I am going to Philadelphia to visit an old friend. If you live in that city, perhaps you know him. He is Ralph Stewart."

"Yes, I know him," Robert acknowledged ungraciously.

Cortland evidently expected that this was the opening wedge to a conversation. But it wasn't.

Robert Ames showed no inclination to talk, and the other finally moved away and disappeared in the direction of the smoking car.

By the time Ames arrived in Philadelphia, he had forgotten all about the incident. He went at once to his office at the bank and busied himself with the mail lying on his desk.

At the usual closing hour he strode out upon the sidewalk and wandered aimlessly about for about thirty minutes.

He was not in a pleasant frame of mind and had no desire to go home where the inquisitive Alice awaited him, ready to ask many questions.

He could not answer them. It would be impossible.

"I'll spend the evening at the club," he said to himself. "Perhaps the gay voices of my old companions or a game of cards will help me to forget some of my recent trouble."

When Robert entered the City Club, which was one of the most exclusive and fashionable, he was greeted by a joyous exclamation.

The man who was first to greet him was Ralph Stewart.

He had been a partner with Robert's father for many years and his affection for the old man was transferred to the son.

"Hello, Robert!" he cried. "It is a pleasure indeed to see you come back to the old haunt. You are almost a stranger."

Robert Ames smiled feebly.

He acknowledged the pleasant salutation of his friend and passed on. If he expected to find a secluded spot where he might sit and reflect, he was doomed to disappointment.

The news of his presence spread quickly, and he found himself surrounded by a throng of old friends who seemed eager to welcome him.

His efforts to refrain from participating in a game of cards were overruled. That he was a great favorite was evidenced by the hearty reception.

The man most assidious in his attentions was Ralph Stewart.

He would not budge an inch from the side of his old friend, and in spite of Robert's objections he persuaded him to take a hand in a game of cards.

"By the way, Bob," he said at length, "I want you to meet my friend Cortland. He is a capital fellow and a good loser. You won't object if he plays with us?"

"Not in the least, Ralph," was the reply. "I shall be pleased to meet your friend."

A moment later Robert Ames found himself standing face to face with the man whom he had met on his way back to Philadelphia. The recognition was mutual.

With the affable smile of a thorough man of the world, Earl Cortland advanced and took the outstretched hand of the young millionaire.

Robert Ames was far too well bred to betray his displeasure at again meeting this man who had impressed him so unfavorably.

Yet while his handclasp did not lack in warmth, the expression of his eyes remained somewhat cold.

"Mr. Ames and I have met before," Cortland said with a bow. "We were traveling companions on the Eastern Express."

Robert nodded.

"Your stay in New York was not a very long one, Mr. Ames," Cortland chattered.

"No," the young millionaire answered rather curtly. "I was called back to this city by a telegram. Urgent business, you know."

The conversation during the game of cards was

carried on mostly by Ralph Stewart and Cortland.

Repeated efforts to draw Robert Ames into it failed signally. He retained an attitude of reserve which was not to be broken down.

The fact of the matter was that Robert could not warm up to this man for whom Ralph Stewart vouched. There was something about him which awoke his distrust.

However, he could not deny that this Cortland was a fluent talker and that his experiences had been manifold and adventurous.

He was a man who had evidently traveled extensively. According to his story he had returned from a long sojourn in Europe.

He spoke very interestingly of the different countries of the continent, the wonderful scenery of Switzerland, and the trophical beauties of Southern Italy.

At last the card game began to lag. It seemed that all the players were listening to the narratives of Cortland.

Even Ralph Stewart grew silent and allowed his friend to have the floor continuously.

Neither Robert Ames nor his friend Stewart was in a mood to enjoy the many humorous anecdotes the other told.

They both were suffering mentally.

While Robert was well acquainted with the unfortunate domestic affairs of his friend Stewart, his own trouble was not known to anyone at the club.

"If I was informed correctly, Mr. Ames has recently joined the ranks of dozile benedicts." Cortland said suddenly.

Robert's face grew stern. The quick change did not escape the observing eyes of Cortland.

Ralph Stewart also noticed that his friend seemed reluctant to discuss the subject of his marriage, and he adroitly changed the subject.

"I understand you added two new horses to your stable of thoroughbreds, Robert," he said. "I presume you will follow the sport of racing more ardently now?"

Robert Ames smiled amiably. He knew that he could rely upon Stewart to say the right thing at the right time.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "I am the owner of a formidable string of horses. If nothing interferes with my plans, I will ship them west this coming spring. I have two horses, however, that I would sell if I could get a reasonable price for them."

Earl Cortland was all ears.

The sudden turn of the conversation interested him vastly — yes, more than either of the other two men suspected. To him it was a favorable opportunity and he made use of it.

"By jove," he exclaimed, "I am glad to hear that, Mr. Ames. I am looking for a couple of horses who still have some speed left in them. Perhaps we could come to an understanding in this matter."

Robert Ames replied by nodding his head.

He was not very anxious to deal with this man, yet he was not averse of selling his horses even to him, providing he would pay the price.

"If you have no objections, Mr. Ames, I should be glad to visit your stable and look the nags over," Cortland continued. "I shall call to-morrow, if convenient for you."

Robert assured him that he would be quite welcome. The conversation came to a stop when Ralph Stewart rose and announced that he must be traveling

homeward.

They shook hands as they parted and a few minutes later the young millionaire also was on his way toward the Ames mansion.

For some reason he dreaded his meeting with Alice. He felt guilty of having wronged her anew.

The hour was late when he made his way to his apartment and there was no one to greet him but his faithful old valet Jackson.

Chapter 275

PLAYING WITH FIRE

ALICE was still awake and pacing the floor of the luxurious boudoir when Robert arrived. She heard his footsteps and the words he exchanged with Jackson. Her heart beat longingly, but what her lonely soul yearned for, did not take place.

She expected surely that her husband would inquire after her, and perhaps come to her room before he retired.

Had she not the right to expect that as his wife?

When she heard him say good-night to his valet and the door close behind him, she knew that all of her fondest hopes were blasted.

She felt utterly forsaken and alone.

The hot tears of bitter disappointment came into her eyes and she threw herself upon her bed and wept for almost an hour.

When at last she fell asleep she dreamed of the man she loved.

She saw him come toward her with his arms outstretched.

With a joyful cry she ran to meet him, but it seemed that a lovely face suddenly arose between them.

His arms were about her hated rival and Alice moaned aloud in her mental agony. Her heart became bitter and hard.

She longed to revenge herself upon the man who had trampled her love under his feet.

It awoke the tigress within her.

Alice awoke with a start. The room was flooded with the light of a clear morning sun, and she rose hurriedly.

She rang for her maid and ordered her breakfast served in her boudoir.

She secured the information that her husband was still asleep, which seemed to meet with her entire approval.

After eating scantily she donned her riding habit, and ordered her favorite horse saddled and brought to the side entrance.

With a cold nod to the stableman she mounted and cantered along Broad Street toward the Schuylkill river.

She made a beautiful picture as she dashed along the driveway. Her close fitting riding habit set off her wonderful figure to a decided advantage.

Her black eyes sparkled with life and enthusiasm.

She tried to banish those unhappy thoughts from her mind, and a certain degree of comfort entered her heart as she pondered over the new plan she had adopted.

It was a daring plan, yet she would not be denied the pleasures of a passionate and desiring woman.

If her husband persisted in spurning her love perhaps there were those who would not.

At the extreme end of the famous Schuylkill river drive the Ames family had always maintained their summer home.

It was a picturesque villa which stood on the bank of the river.

The surrounding country was a succession of rolling hills and grass covered meadows, and the holdings of the Ames estate ran into the thousands of acres.

Every spring, as soon as the robins began to appear, a force of servants worked diligently to make all the necessary preparations for the arrival of the Ames family.

It was toward this spot that Alice directed her high-bred animal, and her cheeks tingled with the cold and refreshing atmosphere as she dashed through the winding road of a dense forest which adjoined the large estate.

A little cry of surprise escaped her lips as she gazed upon the wonderful scene before her.

The glorious morning sun was reflected in myriads of brilliant diamonds which seemed to have been cast over the entire universe.

The intense quietness of it all was awe-inspiring. Alice brought her animal to a stop and viewed the snow laden trees with a smile playing about her carmine lips.

Suddenly the sharp report of a rifle re-echoed through the forest. This was immediately followed by the furious barking of several dogs.

With a curious look in her black eyes, Alice dashed forward. She guided her horse in the direction whence the disturbance had come.

Without a word of warning two vicious dogs made their appearance and they made a concerted attack upon Alice's horse.

The animal immediately took fright and dashed away at a frightful rate of speed.

Alice pulled at the reins with all her might, but it soon became evident that she had lost control of the spirited horse. Her face paled as she realized her perilous position.

She was in danger of having her brains dashed out against one of the many over-hanging limbs which barred her way.

She was almost paralyzed with fear when she noticed that the two dogs were still clinging to the heels of the horse. A piercing scream for help broke from her lips.

To her intense relief a young man in a hunter's costume sprang from behind a tree directly in the path of the fast flying animal.

With lightning quickness he seized the bridle, and with a wonderful display of strength and nerve brought the horse to a stop.

"Nero—Pluto!" he yelled at the dogs, "come here and stop your foolishness."

The two dogs immediately ceased their attack and ran up to their master.

With the grace of a cavalier of the old school he helped Alice dismount.

She was still pale from her terrible fright, and it was some moments before she could say a word.

Her eyes scrutinized the young man thoroughly. She noticed two things at once—that he was young, and very good looking.

There was something about his frank face, his somewhat daring smile that pleased her.

She was conscious also that her rescuer was deeply impressed with her wonderful beauty. This also was pleasant to her.

He was struggling to find some adequate or proper words to say to her.

The silence between them grew embarrassing.

"I presume I must call you the saviour of my life," she said at last with a roguish smile playing about her lips.

The low tone of her melodious voice seemed to awaken him from his mental lethargy. His tongue too, became loosened and he said with a modest blush:

"I could scarcely lay claim to an act of heroism when in truth my own carelessness was responsible for your awful fright," he replied. "I am glad, however, that I arrived in time to save you from possible injury. I am afraid the beauty was at the mercy of the beast."

There was a roguish look in his eyes as he spoke the last words.

Alice looked at the young man a trifle surprised. His unexpected compliment and rather daring attitude were sufficient cause for a reprimand.

Never before had a man in the employ of the Ames family spoken to her in that fashion.

The reason for this was obvious, however.

This handsome man was the new assistant groundkeeper, Larry Coleman, who had recently been employed by her husband.

He was known to Alice, but he had not as yet made the acquaintance of his young master's beautiful and venturesome wife.

"I am Mrs. Robert Ames," she said after an awkward pause, "and you are Larry Coleman, are you not?"

"Coleman is my name," he answered with evident embarrassment. "I — I hope I did not offend you with my foolish remark."

"Not in the least," she said with a frank smile. "I was well aware that you were ignorant of my identity; besides, a compliment does not very often offend a woman, no matter who bestows it."

"I am very glad to hear you say that," the young man replied humbly.

His face had turned crimson and his voice trembled as he spoke. Alice looked upon the discomfiture of Larry Coleman with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

What was there about this young man that im-

pressed her so strangely?

"If you will be kind enough to assist me into the saddle, I will return to the city," she ventured.

Without a word Larry Coleman lifted her from the ground.

His blood raced madly through his veins as she laid in his arms for only the least fraction of a minute. Once her face was very close to his own, and her black eyes held his in a compelling gaze.

His hat had fallen from his head, and his brown curly locks played about his temples.

"Will you kindly fasten the saddle belt?" she said in a scarcely audible voice. "I believe it has become loose."

Larry Coleman was at her side in an instant. He fastened the belt securely while the gaze of Alice rested on his dark head.

Once her hand touched his, and the young man recoiled as if he had felt an electric shock.

His task was nearly done when an unexpected thing happened.

Alice bent over, and before Larry Coleman suspected her intention she kissed him full upon his forehead.

Then she gathered the reins and dashed off like a whirlwind.

The young man stood like a statue of marble for some minutes. He did not move until the biting cold wind began to benumb his fingers.

He could hardly believe what had happened, and his intense astonishment knew no bounds.

His hand went to his forehead. With a smile he touched the spot she had kissed.

"God!" he burst out at last, "she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

Alice reached the Ames mansion after a hard ride It seemed that her spirits had undergone a complete change.

The melancholy frown on her lovely face was entirely missing and the light of a happy woman who had once more made a conquest with her beauty, shone from her eyes.

To her the handsome young ground-keeper was absolutely nothing. Yet it pleased her immensely to know that this man could be counted upon to fight for her cause if the occasion demanded it.

That much she had cunningly read in his submissive eyes.

As she entered the reception hall she came face to face with Robert.

"Hello, Alice," he said in a tone of affected gayety. "Have you been out for a canter?"

"Yes, Robert," she replied carelessly. "You know I have to find some way to amuse myself, since my husband is obliged to travel frequently.

"If it was not for the little pleasure which I derive from a dash along the Schuylkill river, life would be unbearable to me."

Robert Ames caught the shaft full in his face. For a moment he was at a loss what to say.

He knew only too well that Alice spoke the truth. Ever since that fateful night when he made her his wife, he had treated her like a stranger.

Only once had he kissed her.

"I—I will try to make your life a happier one in the future, if I can," he faltered at last.

"By the way, Alice," he continued, "a Mr. Cortland—Earl Cortland, may pay us a visit to-day. He is very much interested in horses. I think you will find him a man well worth knowing.

"He has traveled extensively, speaks several languages, and all that sort of thing, you know. Mr. Stewart vouches for him. I met him at the club."

Alice looked up.

"I presume since Mr. Stewart vouches for him, all the doors of the exclusive set will be thrown open to him," Robert spoke again. "I suppose we must make an effort to entertain a little more.

"I know things here have been a trifle dull since father died. I had thought of giving a fox hunt in a short time, and invite some of our old friends."

"Really," Alice replied with a note of surprise in her voice. "I suppose we can discuss this proposed fox hunt at another time, I am very tired just now."

With a curt nod of her lovely dark head she passed on and walked up the broad staircase like a queen.

When she reached her own apartment a low laugh broke from her lips.

"That was only the beginning. I'll taunt him with my utter indifference and make him love me," she murmured passionately. "Unless all my charms and powers fail me, I shall yet see him at my feet."

Chapter 276

A DREADFUL SURPRISE

TRUE TO his promise, Earl Cortland presented himself at the Ames mansion at the hour mentioned and he was ushered into the reception hall. He greeted Robert Ames with the air of an old acquaintance. Their conversation was on general topics and at last the object of his coming was discussed.

Robert rose and bade Cortland to follow to the stables. There was a surprise in store for the visitor as he entered the spacious and well kept stable.

The sight of so many thoroughbreds pleased him immensely and he seemed to be a good judge of horse flesh.

The two horses for sale were pointed out to him, and in less than fifteen minutes the bargain was made to the satisfaction of both.

The two men made their way back to the reception room, and Robert Ames sent for Alice.

The young mistress of the Ames mansion made her appearance, dressed in a pink silk tea-gown.

She looked bewitchingly beautiful as she swept into the room with her head raised proudly, and an expectant smile on her lips.

She acknowledged the introduction of Earl Cortland with slight inclination of her queenly head, then she raised her eyes to his.

Suddenly the color left her face and she recoiled a few steps. She clutched at the edge of the table for support.

"Why, what is the matter, Alice?" Robert Ames cried in alarm.

She had recovered her self-possession almost instantly, and with an innocent smile, said:

"Oh, it is nothing. The air is somewhat stifling in here. I feel a trifle dizzy. Please have a seat, Mr. Cortland."

Earl Cortland sat down with a peculiar expression on his dark face.

Robert followed suit and Alice busied herself with rearranging the roses in a costly vase.

It was perhaps a good thing that her back was turned to the two men.

They could not see her trembling hands nor the terrible agitation which seemed to shake her frame from head to foot.

Alice was fighting desperately to retain her composure. Her brain was busy in forming a plan how to escape from the room for a few minutes.

Suddenly she uttered a startled cry.

Her tender fingers had come in contact with a sharp thorn, which penetrated the flesh and caused the blood to flow freely.

"How clumsy of me," she said hastily. "You will pardon me a moment, gentlemen."

She held up her still bleeding finger and swept from the room.

Earl Cortland looked about with the eyes of a man who appreciates luxury and comfort.

"You are indeed a fortunate young man, Mr. Ames," he said pleasantly. "The attractions here are sufficient to keep most any man away from his club."

Robert did not answer. He felt rather uncomfortable.

The compliment of the other did not seem to add

to his strained mental tranquility. He was nervous.

"Will you have a cigar, Mr. Cortland?" he said after an awkward pause.

"Thanks."

The two men lit their cigars and soon were engaged in an animated conversation.

Cortland wisely refrained from commenting upon the prolonged absence of the other's wife.

First they talked about horses, then the subject was shifted to music.

Cortland rose and stepped over to the piano. He seemed to be enthusiastic about an opera he had heard in Munich, the musical center of Germany.

He played a few bars, which was ample to demonstrate the fact that he was a thorough musician.

At this juncture Alice returned. She was calm and composed. Not a shadow of her former agitation was visible.

She smiled serenely as she advanced into the room.

"You are quite a musician, Mr. Cortland," she said with an air of appreciation. "Was that not the Barcarole from the Tales of Hoffman?"

"Yes, Mrs. Ames. Do you know the opera?"

"I was fortunate enough to hear it abroad. I think it is wonderful," she answered with enthusiasm. "I am a lover of opera."

"Of course, you play?"

"A little."

"Ah, that is splendid. Perhaps I could prevail upon you to favor us with a few selections from the Tales of Hoffman," he said, looking at her appealingly. "It is my favorite."

Alice shot her husband a swift glance. The topic of music did not seem to interest him very much, for he

was gazing absently out of the window.

She took her seat at the piano. Her fingers trembled slightly as she searched among a heap of instrumental music.

At last she found what she wanted. Earl Cortland took his position beside her, and turned the sheet. Alice played beautifully.

Her slender white fingers glided over the keyboard with the celerity of a finished musician.

After the last bars of the famous opera were swallowed up in the spacious room, she rose and responded to the enthusiastic applause of Cortland with a curt nod.

Suddenly the hand of the man shot out with a small white envelope firmly held between his fingers.

Alice ignored the gesture entirely and the sealed missive fell to the floor.

"You are rather careless, Mr. Cortland," she said icily. "You have dropped something which may be of value."

Cortland stooped hastily and picked it up.

His face had gone strangely white. A dangerous gleam came into his eyes.

Robert Ames had risen from his chair and walked over to the window.

It was fortunate that his back was turned this moment, which prevented him from being a witness of the unusual scene.

Cortland was overstepping the bounds of propriety by remaining at the Ames mansion for much longer than his errand seemed to warrant.

He was apparently waiting for something, some opportunity which had not presented itself as yet.

He eyed Robert Ames furtively from under his bushy brows.

The frown disappeared from his face and with his

usual affable smile he approached the young master of the house.

"You don't seem to appreciate our music, Mr. Ames," he said. "I presume it is not your hobby."

"To be perfectly frank with you—no," Robert replied. "My hobby is horses and amateur photographs. Sceneries especially. I have quite a collection of both."

"I should be pleased to see some of your photos," Cortland ventured. "I am somewhat of an amateur in that line myself."

Robert Ames turned to go to the library to fetch his album. This was the opportunity Cortland had been patiently waiting for.

He swiftly turned to Alice and whispered a few words.

"How dared you follow me here?" she panted. "It was cowardly of you to enter this house under an assumed name. Why did you do it?"

"The explanation is a simple one. Had I introduced myself as George Ballard to your husband, you would doubtlessly have moved heaven and earth to prevent my coming here."

"What do you want?' she said almost roughly.

"The letter you refused to take would have explained everything to you. There really won't be time enough to tell you all before your husband returns. I want you to meet me to-morrow at eleven o'clock at the Market Street ferry.

"We can take a ride over to Camden, and I know a place where we can talk together as long as we like without being overheard."

"I—I cannot meet you, and what is more, I won't," she replied hotly. "The past is dead and you have no right to remind me of it."

"The past is not dead," he said menacingly. "It

is still fresh in my memory, and it is that memory which gives me power over you. You must meet me to-morrow, do you hear?"

Alice was forced to retreat before the malignant glance of the man. There was something in his look which made her cower before him.

The approaching steps of Robert Ames put an end to this intensely dramatic scene.

When he entered the room he found Cortland and his wife engaged in a harmless conversation.

His wife was smiling up at Cortland.

It seemed somewhat forced, but there was nothing else to betray her powerful emotion.

"This is the particular part of the music which so strongly appealed to me," Cortland was saying. He then turned swiftly and played a few bars.

Alice tried her very best to take the cue so cunningly given by Cortland, but she was scarcely equal to the task. Her face was deadly pale, and there was a haunted look in her eyes.

She kept her face averted while her husband exhibited his efforts with the camera.

She breathed a sigh of relief when the unwelcome visitor rose at last and made his departure. She gave him her finger tips, but evaded his eyes.

When the door had closed behind him, Robert turned to his wife.

"What is your opinion of Mr. Cortland, Alice?" he asked.

"To be perfectly frank, I dislike him," she answered. "He impresses me to be a man who would take unlimited privileges with the least encouragement. Then there is something about his eyes that makes me feel uncomfortable."

"I am very sorry, Alice," Robert said. "I had so

hoped you would like him. I thought him interesting; besides, he has taken the members of the club to which I belong, by storm."

"As the mistress of your house I shall make welcome any guest you see fit to invite, Robert. Let us not discuss this man any longer," Alice replied after a little pause.

"The subject is an unpleasant one to me. Now I must beg you to excuse me, I am suffering with a very severe headache."

Without waiting to hear his reply she hurried from the room.

Chapter 277

THE MEETING

THE FOLLOWING day Alice pleaded illness. The news did not seem to surprise Robert Ames. Before he went to his office at the bank he tried to see her in her boudoir, but she refused him admittance.

Physically Alice felt well enough, but mentally she was in a panic. Her haggard face and lusterless eyes told of a sleepless night.

It was almost nine o'clock when she rang for her maid.

She ordered her breakfast brought to her room. After a cold, refreshing bath she dressed hurriedly.

All night she had fought the inevitable, and the awful truth grew more bitter every minute as she watched the handle of the clock.

There was not even the remotest chance for her to escape the ordeal which she dreaded so much.

She must meet him at eleven o'clock.

She felt like a wounded animal which is driven to bay without giving it a possible chance to escape.

All her plans of a happy and peaceful future were put to naught. One single hour with her nemesis had sufficed to blast her fondest hopes.

Her indomitable spirit rose in hot rebellion. She would not allow herself to become the prey of this man whom she had hoped never to see again.

How dared he steal into the confidence of her husband and enter her house under an assumed name?

Continued in next number

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